The Life of Our Venerable Father Onuphrius the Great

Commemorated on June 12

Saint Paphnutius (3857) , who lived in one of the Egyptian desert monasteries, left us an account of how he found Saint Onuphrius the Great and other hermits in the desert. He begins his account thus:

One day, while I was living in silence in my monastery, a desire came to me to go into the inner desert to see if there was a monk there who worked for the Lord more than I. I arose, took some bread and water with me, and set out. I left my monastery without saying anything to anyone and headed for the innermost desert. I walked for four days without eating bread or water and reached a certain cave, closed on all sides and with only one small window. I stood by the window for an hour, hoping that, according to monastic custom, someone would come out of the cave and greet me in Christ. But since no one said anything to me or opened the door, I opened the door myself, entered, and offered my blessing. In the cave, I saw an elder sitting as if sleeping. I again blessed him and touched his shoulder, intending to awaken him, but his body was like earthly dust. Feeling it with my hands, I was convinced that he had been dead for many years. Seeing his clothes hanging on the wall, I touched them; and they were like dust in my hand. Then I took off my mantle and covered the body of the deceased with it. Then, digging a hole in the sandy earth with my own hands, I buried the body of the ascetic with the usual psalmody, prayer, and tears. Then, having eaten a little bread and drunk some water, I regained my strength and spent the night at the grave of the elder.

The next morning, after saying my prayers, I set out on my further journey toward the inner deserts. After traveling for several days, I came upon another cave. Hearing human cries near it, I thought that someone probably lived in that cave. I knocked on the door, but receiving no answer, I entered the cave. Finding no one there, I went outside, thinking to myself that one of God's servants, who had gone into the desert at that time, probably lived here. I decided to wait at that place for that servant of God, for I desired to see him and greet him in the Lord. And I remained in wait all day, continually singing the psalms of David. The place seemed very beautiful to me: a date palm with fruit grew there, and

a small spring of water flowed. I marveled greatly at the beauty of that place and desired to live there myself, if it were possible for me.

As the day was already drawing to a close, I saw a herd of buffalo heading toward me; I also saw a servant of God walking among the animals (this was Timothy the Hermit [3859]). When the herd approached me, I saw a naked man, covering his naked body only with his hair. Approaching the spot where I stood and looking at me, the man mistook me for a spirit and a ghost, and began to pray, for many unclean spirits had tempted him with apparitions in that place, as he himself later told me about it.

I told him:

"Why are you afraid, servant of Jesus Christ, our God? Look at me and the marks of my feet, and know that I am a man just like you; confirm by touch that I am flesh and blood."

Having looked at me and having become convinced that I was really a man, he was consoled and, thanking God, said:

- Amen.

Then he came to me, kissed me, brought me into his cave and offered me date vegetables to eat; he also gave me pure water from the spring, and he himself ate for my sake; then he asked me, saying:

"How did you come here, brother?" I, revealing my thoughts and intentions to him, replied:

– Wishing to see the servants of Christ struggling in this desert, I left my monastery and came here; and God did not deprive me of the fulfillment of my intention, for He granted me to see your holiness.

Then I asked him:

"How did you come here, Father? How many years have you been struggling in this desert, what do you eat, and why do you walk around naked and wear nothing?"

Then he told me the following about himself: “At first I lived in one of the Thebaid cenobiums [3860] , leading a monastic life and zealously serving God. I was engaged in weaving. But such a thought arose in me: leave the cenobium and live alone, labor, struggling, so as to receive a great reward from God, for from the fruit of your hands you can not only feed yourself, but also feed the poor and give rest to wandering brethren. Having lovingly heeded my

thought, I left the brotherhood, built myself a cell near the city and practiced my handicrafts; for me everything was enough, for by the labor of my hands I collected everything I needed; many came to me, demanding the products of my hands and brought everything they needed; I gave shelter to strangers, and what was excess I distributed to the poor and needy. But the enemy of our salvation, the devil, who always wars with everyone, envied my life. Wishing to ruin all my labors, he inspired a certain woman to come to me because of my handicraft and ask me to prepare some linen. Having prepared it, I gave it to her. Then she asked me to prepare more linen for her; and a conversation arose between us, and boldness appeared. Having conceived sin, we gave birth to iniquity. And I remained with her for six months, sinning continually. But finally, I thought to myself that today or tomorrow death would overtake me and I would suffer eternal torment. And I said to myself: “Woe is me, my soul! It is better for you to flee from here, to be saved from sin and at the same time from eternal torment!”

"Therefore, leaving everything, I secretly fled from there and came to this desert. When I reached this place, I found this cave, a spring, and a date palm tree with twelve branches. Each month, one of the branches produces enough fruit to feed me for thirty days. When the month ends and the fruit on one branch ends, another branch ripens. Thus, by the grace of God I am nourished, and I have nothing else in my cave. And my clothes, having become worn out over time, have perished. After many years (for I have now been struggling in this desert for thirty years), hair has grown on me, as you see; it serves as clothing for me, covering my nakedness."

Having heard all this from the ascetic (narrated by Paphnutius), I asked him:

– Father! At the beginning of your labors in this place, did you experience any obstacles or not?

He answered me:

“I have suffered countless demonic attacks. Many times they have fought me, but they could not overcome me, for the grace of God helped me; I resisted them with the sign of the cross and prayer. Besides the enemy’s attacks, my efforts were also hindered by physical illness; for I suffered greatly from my stomach, so much so that I would fall to the ground from severe pain. I could not say my usual prayers, but, lying in my cave and rolling on the ground, I chanted with great effort, and I had absolutely no strength to leave the cave. I prayed to the merciful God that He would grant me forgiveness of my sins because of my illness. One day, when I was sitting on the ground and grievously suffering from my stomach, I saw an honest man standing before me and saying to me:

- What are you suffering from?

I could hardly answer him:

- I suffer, sir, from my stomach.

He told me:

- Show me where it hurts.

I showed it to him. Then he stretched out his hand and placed his palm on the sore spot; I was immediately healed. And he said to me:

“Now you are healthy, do not sin, so that you do not get worse, but serve the Lord and your God from now and forever.”

Since that time I have not been sick, by the grace of God, glorifying and praising His mercy.

In such a conversation (says Paphnutius) I spent almost the entire night with that venerable father: in the morning I got up for the usual prayer.

When daylight came, I began to earnestly beg that venerable father to allow me to live either near him or somewhere separate from him. He said to me, "You, brother, will not endure the demonic assaults here." For this reason, he did not allow me to remain with him. I also asked him to tell me his name. And he said, "My name is Timothy. Remember me, beloved brother, and pray for me to Christ our God, that He may show me His mercy to the end, which He has granted me."

I, says Paphnutius, fell at his feet, asking him to pray for me. He said to me: "May our Lord Jesus Christ bless you, may He protect you from every temptation of the enemy, and may He guide you on the right path, so that you may attain holiness without hindrance."

Having blessed me, Saint Timothy sent me away in peace. I took the date palms from his hands for my journey, drew water from the spring into my vessel, then, bowing to the holy elder, I left him, glorifying and thanking God for having granted me the privilege of seeing such a saint of His, hearing his words, and receiving his blessing.

On my return journey, several days later, I came to a desert monastery and stopped there to rest and spend some time. With sorrow, I pondered within myself: What kind of life have I had? What have my struggles been? My life could not even be called a shadow compared to the life and struggles of this great saint of God, whom I had just seen.

I spent many days in such reflections, desiring to imitate that righteous man in pleasing God. By the mercy of God, who moved me to care for my soul, I did not hesitate to once again enter the inner desert by the impassable path—the road where the barbarian people called the Maziks lived. I was eager to know if there was another such hermit who served the Lord. I was eager to find him, so that I might receive benefit from him for my soul.

Setting out on the desert journey I was undertaking, I took with me a little bread and water, enough to last me a short time. When I had consumed the bread and water, I grieved, for I had no food. However, I persevered and walked for another four days and four nights without food or drink, until my body became completely exhausted. I fell to the ground and awaited death. Then I saw a saintly, beautiful, and radiant man approach me. Placing his hand on my mouth, he became invisible. I immediately felt a surge of strength within me, so much so that I had no desire to eat or drink.

Having risen, I again set out for the inner desert and walked for another four days and four nights without food or drink; but soon I again became exhausted from hunger and thirst. Raising my hands to heaven, I prayed to the Lord, and again I saw the same man, who approached me, touched my lips with his hand, and became invisible. From this I received new strength and set out on my journey.

On the seventeenth day of my journey, I came to a certain high mountain. Weary from the journey, I sat down at the foot of the mountain to rest for a while. At that moment, I saw a man approaching me, very terrible in appearance. He was covered entirely with hair, like a beast, and his hair was white as snow, for he was gray with age. The hair of his head and beard was very long, reaching even to the ground and covering his entire body like a kind of garment, and his loins were girded with the leaves of desert plants. When I saw this man approaching me, I was afraid and fled to a rock located at the top of the mountain. He, having reached the foot of the mountain, sat down in the shade, intending to rest, for he was greatly exhausted from the heat and also from old age. Looking at the mountain, he saw me and, turning to me, said: "Come to me, man of God! I am a man like you; I live in this desert, striving for God’s sake.”

I (says Paphnutius) having heard this, hastened to him and fell at his feet. He said to me:

"Arise, my son! For you too are a servant of God and a friend of His saints; and your name is Paphnutius."

I stood up. Then he ordered me to sit down, and I sat joyfully beside him. I began to earnestly ask him to tell me his name and describe his life to me—how he struggles in the desert and how long he has lived here. Yielding to my persistent requests, he began his narrative about himself thus: “My name is Onuphrius; I have lived in this desert for sixty

years, wandering through the mountains; I have not seen a single person, now I see only you alone. Formerly, I lived in a certain venerable monastery, called Eryti [3861] , located near the city of Hermopolis, which is in the Thebaid region. In that monastery live a hundred brethren; they all live in complete unanimity with one another, leading a common harmonious life in love for our Lord Jesus Christ. They have common food and clothing; they lead a silent, fasting life in peace, glorifying the mercy of the Lord. In my childhood, as a novice, I was instructed there by the holy fathers in fervent faith and love for the Lord, and I was also taught the rules of monastic life. I heard them speak of the holy prophet of God, Elijah , namely, how he, strengthened by God, lived fasting in the desert. I also heard of the holy Forerunner of the Lord, John , to whom no man has ever been likened (Matthew 11:11), regarding his life in the desert until the day of his appearance to Israel. Hearing all this, I asked the holy fathers: "What then? Are those who labor in the desert greater than you in the eyes of God?"

They answered me: “Yes, child, they are greater than we; for we see each other daily, we perform church singing together with joy; if we want to eat, we have bread ready, and likewise, if we want to drink, we have water ready; if it happens that one of us gets sick, he receives consolation from the brethren, for we live together, help each other, and serve for the love of God; but those who live in the desert are deprived of all this. If any misfortune happens to any of the desert-dwellers, who will console him in his illness, who will help and serve him if the power of Satan attacks him, where will he find a person who will encourage his mind and give him instruction, since he is alone? If he has no food, where will he get it without difficulty; in the same way, if he is thirsty, he will not find water nearby. There, child, the work is incomparably greater than with us who live together; Those who undertake the desert life begin to serve God with greater zeal, impose upon themselves a stricter fast, subject themselves to hunger, thirst, and the midday heat; they magnanimously endure the cold of the night, firmly resist the wiles of the invisible enemy, strive in every way to overcome him, and with zeal strive to traverse the narrow and sorrowful path leading to the Kingdom of Heaven. For this reason, God sends holy angels to them, who bring them food, bring water from the rock, and strengthen them so much that the words of the prophet Isaiah are fulfilled regarding them : *"But those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint"* (Isaiah 40:31). Even if one of them is not granted the vision of the angels, he is in no case deprived of the invisible presence of God's angels, who guard such a hermit in all his ways, protect him from the slanders of the enemy, assist him in his good deeds, and offer the hermit's prayers to God. If any unexpected attack from the enemy befalls one of the hermits, he raises his hands to God, and immediately help is sent down from above, and all misfortunes are driven away for the sake of his purity of heart. Have you not heard, child, that Scripture says that God does not neglect

those who seek Him, for the poor will not be forever forgotten, and the hope of the needy will not be utterly lost (Psalm 9:19). And again: "But they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and He delivered them out of their distresses" (Psalm 106:6): for the Lord rewardeth every man according to the work which he undertaketh. Blessed is the man that doeth the will of the Lord upon earth, and worketh diligently for Him: such a man is ministered unto by the angels, though invisibly: they rejoice his heart with spiritual joy, and strengthen him every hour while he is in the flesh."

All this I, humble Onuphrius, heard in my monastery from the holy fathers, and my heart was delighted by these words, for these words were sweeter to me than honey, and it seemed to me that I was in another world; for an irresistible desire to go into the desert arose in me. Rising at night and taking a little bread, so that it would barely suffice for four days, I left the monastery, placing all my hope in God; I took the road leading to the mountain, intending to go from there into the desert. Just as I began to enter the desert, I saw a brightly shining ray of light before me. Greatly frightened, I stopped and began to think about returning to the monastery. Meanwhile, the ray of light approached me, and I heard a voice from it saying: “Fear not! I am the Angel who has walked with you from the day of your birth, for I have been assigned to you by God to keep you; I was commanded by the Lord to lead you into this desert. Be perfect and humble in heart before the Lord, serve Him with joy, and I will not depart from you until the Creator commands me to take your soul."

Having said this from a ray of light, the Angel walked ahead of me, and I followed him joyfully. After walking about six or seven milliarias , I saw a fairly spacious cave; at that moment, the ray of Angelic light disappeared from my eyes. Approaching the cave, I wanted to know if anyone was there. Approaching the doors, I, according to monastic custom, cried out: "Bless!"

And I saw an elder, honorable and comely in appearance; the grace of God and spiritual joy shone on his face and in his gaze. Seeing this elder, I fell at his feet and bowed to him. He, raising me with his hand, kissed me and said: "Is this you, Brother Onuphrius, my fellow worker in the Lord? Enter, child, into my dwelling. May God be your helper; abide in your calling, performing good deeds in the fear of God."

Entering the cave, I sat down and remained with him for many days. I strove to learn his virtues from him, in which I succeeded, for he taught me the rules of the hermit life. When the elder saw that my spirit was already so enlightened that I understood what deeds were pleasing to the Lord Jesus Christ; seeing also that I had become strengthened for fearless struggle with the secret enemies and terrors of the desert, the elder said to me: "Arise, child; I will lead you to

another cave, located in the inner desert. Live there alone and struggle in the Lord. For this is why the Lord sent you here—that you might be an inhabitant of the inner desert."

Having said this, he took me and led me into the innermost desert. We walked for four days and four nights. Finally, on the fifth day, we found a small cave. The holy man then said to me: "This is the very place that God has prepared for your ascetic labors." And the elder stayed with me for thirty days, teaching me good deeds. At the end of thirty days, he entrusted me to God and returned to the place of his ascetic labors. From then on, he came to me once a year; he visited me annually until his departure to the Lord. In the last year, he departed to the Lord, staying with me as was his custom. I wept very much and buried his body near my home.

Then I, humble Paphnutius, asked him: "Father of honor! How many labors did you undertake at the beginning of your arrival in the desert?"

The blessed elder answered me: “Have faith in me, my beloved brother, that I have undertaken such difficult labors that I have already many times despaired of my life, considering myself close to death: for I was exhausted from hunger and thirst; from the very beginning of my arrival in the desert I had nothing to eat or drink, except perhaps by chance I found desert herbs, which served as my food; my thirst was cooled only by the dew of heaven; the heat of the sun scorched me during the day, and at night I froze from the cold: my body was covered with raindrops from the dew of heaven; what else have I not endured, what labors and struggles have I not undertaken in this impassable desert? To recount all the labors and struggles is impossible, and it is also inappropriate to communicate what a man must do alone for the love of God. The good God, seeing that I had devoted myself entirely to the ascetic feats of fasting, condemning myself to hunger and thirst, commanded His Angel to care for me and bring me a little bread and water daily to strengthen my body. Thus I was nourished by the Angel for thirty years. At the end of these thirty years, God gave me more abundant sustenance, for near my cave I found a date palm with twelve branches. Each branch bore fruit separately, one in one month, another in the next, until all twelve months were completed. When one month ends, the fruit on one branch also ceases to bear fruit; when the next month begins, fruit begins to grow on another branch. Moreover, by God's command, a spring of living water began to flow near me. And now for another thirty years I have been struggling with such riches, sometimes receiving bread from an Angel, sometimes eating dates with desert roots, which, according to God’s arrangement, seem to me sweeter than honey; I drink water from this source, giving thanks to God; and most of all I am nourished and filled with the sweetness of the words of God, as it is written: *“Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God”* (Matthew 4:4). Brother Paphnutius!

If you fulfill the will of God with all diligence, then you will receive from God everything you need; for in the Holy Gospel it is said: *“Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat? or drink? or what shall we wear?’ For the Gentiles seek all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you”* (Matthew 6:31–33).

When Onuphrius was saying all this, I (Paphnutius narrates) was greatly amazed at his wondrous life. Then I asked him again: "Father, how do you partake of the most pure Mysteries of Christ on Saturday and Sunday?

He answered me: “An Angel of the Lord comes to me, bringing with him the most pure Mysteries of Christ and distributing them to me. And not only to me does the Angel come with Divine Communion, but also to the other desert ascetics who live for God’s sake in the desert and who do not see the face of man; distributing Communion, he fills their hearts with inexpressible joy. If any of these desert dwellers desire to see a human being, then the Angel takes him and lifts him up to heaven, so that he may see the saints and be glad. The soul of such a desert dweller is enlightened like light, and rejoices in spirit, having been granted to see the blessings of heaven; and then the desert dweller forgets all his labors undertaken in the desert. When the ascetic returns to his place, he begins to serve the Lord even more zealously, hoping to receive in heaven what he has been granted to see.”

Onuphrius (says Paphnutius) spoke with me about all this at the foot of the mountain where we met. I was filled with great joy from such a conversation with the saint and also forgot all the toils of my journey, beset by hunger and thirst. Strengthened in spirit and body, I said: "Blessed is the man who has been granted to see you, holy father, and to hear your beautiful and sweet words!" He said to me: "Let us arise, brother, and go to my dwelling."

And having risen, we went.

I (says Paphnutius) never ceased to marvel at the grace of the venerable elder; after walking two or three milliaria, we approached the saint's venerable cave. Near the cave grew a rather large date palm and flowed a small spring of living water. Stopping near the cave, the venerable elder prayed. Having finished his prayer, he said, "Amen."

Then he sat down and invited me to sit next to him. And we conversed, telling each other of God's mercies.

As the day began to decline and the sun was already setting in the west, I saw clean bread lying between us and water prepared. And the blessed man said to me: "Brother, eat of the bread lying before you and drink of the water, that you may be strengthened; for I see that you are exhausted from hunger and thirst and the toils of the journey."

I answered him: “As my Lord lives, I will not eat or drink alone, but only with you.”

The old man did not consent to taste it; I begged him for a long time and could hardly persuade him to fulfill my request; stretching out our hands, we took the bread, broke it and tasted it; we were satisfied, there was even some bread left over; then we drank water and gave thanks to God; and we remained all that night in prayer to God.

When day broke, I noticed that the saint's face had changed after the morning prayerful chant, and I was greatly alarmed. He, realizing this, said to me: "Fear not, Brother Paphnutius, for God, merciful to all, has sent you to me so that you may bury my body. Today I will end my temporal life and depart to eternal life in eternal rest with my Christ."

It was then the twelfth day of the month of June; and the Venerable Onuphrius gave me, Paphnutius, a commandment, saying: "Beloved brother! When you return to Egypt, remind all the brethren and all Christians of me."

I (says Paphnutius) said to him: “Father! After your departure, I would like to remain here in your place.”

But the saint said to me: "Child! You were sent by God to this desert not to live ascetically in it, but to see the servants of God, to return and tell the brethren of the virtuous life of the hermits, for the benefit of their souls and to the glory of Christ our God. Go then, child, to Egypt, to your monastery, and also to the other monasteries, and tell them all that you saw and heard in the desert; tell them also what you will yet see and hear; and strive hard in good works, serving the Lord."

When the monk said this, I fell at his feet with the words: “Bless me, most honorable father, and pray for me, that I may find mercy before God: pray for me, that my Savior may grant me the honor of seeing you in the next age, just as He granted me the honor of seeing you in this life.”

The Venerable Onuphrius, lifting me from the ground, said to me: “Child Paphnutius! May your request not be disregarded by God, but may God fulfill it; may God bless you and strengthen you in His love and enlighten your mental eyes to the vision of God; may He deliver you from every misfortune and the snares of the adversary and may you continue the good work you have begun; may His Angels guard you in all your ways (Psalm 90:11), may they protect you from invisible enemies, so that the latter will not be able to slander you before God in the hour of terrible trial.”

After this, the venerable father offered me a final kiss in the Lord; then he began to pray to the Lord with tears and heartfelt sighs. Kneeling and praying for quite a while, he lay down on the ground and uttered his final words: "Into

Thy hands, O my God, I commend my spirit!" As he spoke, a wondrous light shone upon him from heaven, and in the radiance of this light, the saint, his face rejoicing, gave up his spirit . And immediately the voice of angels was heard in the air, singing and blessing God; for the holy angels, having taken the soul of the saint, joyfully lifted it up to the Lord.

I (Paphnutius narrates) began to weep and lament over his honorable body, grieving over the sudden loss of him whom I had so recently found. Then, taking off my clothes, I tore off my inner lining and covered the saint's body with it, then dressed myself in the outer garment again, so as not to return to the brethren naked. I found a large stone in which, by God's arrangement, a coffin-like depression had been carved; into this stone I laid the holy body of the great saint of God, singing psalmody appropriate to the occasion. Then, gathering many smaller stones, I covered the saint's body with them.

After all this, I began to pray to God, asking Him to allow me to dwell in that place; I was about to enter the cave, but immediately before my eyes the cave collapsed, the date palm that had nourished the saint was torn from its roots, and the source of living water dried up; seeing all this, I understood that it was not pleasing to God for me to live here.

Intending to leave, I ate the bread left over from the day before and drank the water in the vessel. Then, raising my hands to heaven and lifting my eyes to the sky, I began to pray again. Then I saw the same man I had seen earlier while traveling in the desert; it was the same man who, having strengthened me, walked ahead of me.

As I left that place, my soul was greatly grieved, regretting that I had not been privileged to see the Venerable Onuphrius alive for a longer time. But then my soul rejoiced, reflecting that I had been privileged to enjoy his holy conversation and receive a blessing from his lips; and so I went on, glorifying God.

After walking for four days, I came to a certain cell, standing high on a mountain, which had a cave; entering it, I found no one; after sitting for a while, I began to think to myself: “Does anyone live in this cell to which God has led me?”

While I was thinking thus, a holy man, white with gray hair, entered; his appearance was wondrous and radiant; he was dressed in a garment woven from willow branches. Seeing me, he said:

“Is this you, brother Paphnutius, who buried the body of the Venerable Onuphrius?”

I, realizing that he had received a revelation from God about me, fell at his feet. He, comforting me, said, "Arise, brother! God has deemed you worthy to be a friend of His saints; for I know, by God's providence, that you were destined to come to me. I will also reveal to you, beloved brother, about myself, that I have lived in this desert for sixty years, and never in all that time have I seen anyone come to me except the brethren who dwell here with me."

While we were conversing, three other elders, similar to the saint, entered. They immediately said to me, "Bless me, brother! You are Brother Paphnutius, our coworker in the Lord. You buried the body of Saint Onuphrius. Rejoice, brother, for you have been granted to behold the great grace of God. The Lord has announced to us that you will come to us today. The Lord has commanded you to remain with us for one day. We have been in this desert for sixty years now, each living separately; on Saturdays, for the Resurrection, we gather here. We have not seen another man, but now we see you alone."

After we had talked about the venerable father Onuphrius and about the other saints, after two hours those elders said to me: “Take, brother, a little bread and strengthen yourself, for you have come from afar; it is fitting for us to rejoice with you.”

We arose, offered a unanimous prayer to God, and saw before us five pure loaves of bread—very tasty, soft, and warm, as if freshly baked. Then the elders brought some of the fruits of the earth. Sitting down together, we began to partake of the loaves. And the elders said to me: “We have, as we told you, been in this desert for sixty years, and always, by God’s command, only four loaves have been brought to us. Now, on the occasion of your arrival, a fifth loaf has been sent to us. We do not know where these loaves come from, but each of us, entering our cave, finds one loaf daily. And when we gather here on the eve of Sunday, we find four loaves here, one for each.”

After eating that meal, we stood up and gave thanks to the Lord.

Meanwhile, the day was drawing to a close; night would soon fall; having risen to prayer on Saturday evening, we remained all night without sleep, praying until Sunday morning.

When morning came, I began to earnestly beg those fathers to allow me to remain with them until my death. But they said to me, "It is not God's will for you to remain in this desert with us; you must go to Egypt so that you can proclaim to the Christ-loving brethren all that you have seen, for our sake and for the benefit of those who hear."

When they said this, I earnestly began to ask them to reveal their names to me. But they were unwilling to reveal them. I entreated them with great zeal for a long time, but I was completely unsuccessful in my request. They only

said to me: "God, who knows all things, knows our names. Remember us, that we may be deemed worthy to see each other in the heavenly dwellings of God. Strive in every way, beloved, to avoid worldly temptations and allurements, lest you be overcome by them; for they have led many to destruction."

Having heard these words from those holy fathers, I fell at their feet and, having received their blessing, set out on my journey with the peace of God. Those fathers foretold certain events to me, which indeed came to pass.

Having left there, I walked towards the inner desert for one day. Having reached a certain cave, near which was a spring of living water, I sat down to rest there and admired the beauty of the place. For the place was very beautiful; around the spring grew many garden trees laden with fruit. After resting a little, I got up and walked among those trees, marveling at the great quantity of their fruit and wondering to myself: who had planted all this here? There were various kinds of fruit trees here, such as dates, citrons, large and red apples, figs, arugula, and grape vines [3864] hung with large clusters. Many other fruit trees also grew here; their fruit was more delicious than honey; a great fragrance flowed from them, and the spring flowing there watered all those plantings. Seeing all this, I thought that this was God's paradise.

While I was marveling at the great beauty of that place, I saw four handsome youths walking toward me from afar through the desert. They were girded with sheepskins. Approaching me, they said, "Rejoice, brother Paphnutius!"

I fell face down on the ground and bowed to them.

They raised me up, sat down beside me, and began to converse. The faces of these youths shone with the grace of God; it seemed to me that they were not men, but angels descended from heaven. The youths rejoiced greatly at my arrival and, taking the fruit of the tree, offered it to me to eat; and my heart rejoiced because of their love. I stayed with them for seven days, eating the fruit from those trees. Among other things, I asked them: "How did you get here? Where are you from?"

They answered me: "Brother! Since God Himself has sent you to us, we will relate our life to you. We come from the city of Oxyrhynchus [3865] ; our parents were the rulers of that city; desiring to teach us books, they sent us to a school, where we soon learned simple literacy (reading). When we began to make progress in more advanced studies, then one common and unanimous conviction emerged among us, for the Lord assisted us: we decided to study the highest spiritual wisdom. From that time on, gathering together daily, we spurred one another on to zeal for God's service; having a good intention in our hearts, we wanted to find somewhere a quiet, secluded place and remain there for

several days in prayer, in order to learn God's intentions regarding us. Each of us took a little bread and water, just enough to last seven days; then we left the city. After walking for several days, we reached a desert. Entering the desert, we were terrified, for we saw before us a radiant man, shining with heavenly glory. Taking us by the hand, he led us, as you see, to this place. Then he handed us over to a man already aged in years, who served the Lord. And so we have been here for six years. We labored with that elder for one year, during which he taught and instructed us how to serve the Lord. After a year, our father departed to the Lord, and since then we have lived here alone. Behold, beloved brother, we have told you who we are and where we came from. For these six years, we have eaten neither bread nor any other food except the fruit of these garden trees; each of us, alone, dwells in silence. When the Sabbath comes, we all gather at this place, see one another, and take comfort in the Lord. After spending two days together, Saturday and Sunday, we each go back to our own place."

Hearing all this from them, I, humble, says Paphnutius, asked them: "Where do you partake on Saturday and Sunday of the Divine Mysteries of the most pure Body and Blood of Christ, our Savior?"

They answered me: "That is why we gather here every Saturday and Sunday, for a holy Angel, sent by God, comes to us and gives us holy communion."

I, greatly rejoiced upon hearing this, desired to wait with them until Saturday, so that I might see the holy Angel and receive Divine Communion from his hands. And I remained there until Saturday. They, too, stayed in the same place for my sake, each staying in his own cell. And we spent those days in praise of God and in prayer, eating the fruits of the garden and drinking water from the spring. When Saturday arrived, the servants of Christ said to me: "Prepare yourself, beloved brother, for now the Angel of God will come and bring us Divine Communion. He who is deemed worthy to receive Holy Communion from his hands receives forgiveness of all his sins and becomes terrifying to demons, so that Satan's temptations cannot approach him."

While they were telling me this, I smelled a wondrous aroma, as if from a strong burning of incense, and I was greatly amazed, for I had never smelled such a wondrous aroma. I asked the young men:

– Where does such an indescribable fragrance come from?

They answered me:

– The Angel of the Lord approaches with the most pure Mysteries of Christ.

We immediately rose to pray and began to sing and glorify Christ the King, our God. Suddenly, a light from heaven shone upon us; we saw an Angel of God descending from on high, shining like lightning. I fell prostrate to the ground in fear. The youths raised me up and told me not to be afraid. Then I saw an Angel of God standing before us, in the form of a beautiful youth; his beauty was difficult to describe; he held in his hand a holy chalice containing the Divine Gifts. The servants of God approached him one by one and received Communion. After them, I, a sinner and unworthy, approached with great trembling and terror, yet also with unspeakable joy, and was deemed worthy to partake of the most pure Mysteries of Christ from the hands of the Angel. During Communion, I heard the words of the Angel:

– May the Body and Blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, our God, be to you incorruptible food, endless joy, and eternal life.

We responded to this:

- Amen.

After Holy Communion, we received a blessing from that glorious Angel. Then, before our very eyes, he ascended to heaven, while we, falling to the ground, bowed down to God, thanking Him for His great mercy to us. Our hearts were filled with such great joy that it seemed to me I was not on earth, but in heaven; from that great joy, I was as if in a state of rapture. Then those holy servants of God brought vegetables and offered them to me, and, sitting down, we partook of them.

Meanwhile, Saturday ended and night fell; we spent it sleeplessly, singing psalms and praising God. On Sunday, we were granted the same grace of God as on Saturday; for the Angel of God came to us in the same manner and in the same form, and, having given us Holy Communion, filled our hearts with great joy. I, however, having gained boldness, began to ask the Angel of God to allow me to dwell there with the holy servants of God until the end of my life. But he said to me: "It is not pleasing to God that you live here; He commands you to go immediately to Egypt and proclaim to all the brethren what you saw and heard in the desert, so that the rest of the brethren may strive to lead a good life and please Christ our God. In particular, tell everyone in detail about the holy life and blessed end of St. Onuphrius, whom you buried in a rock. "Convey to the brethren all that you heard from his lips. Blessed are you, for you were granted to see such wondrous and mighty works of God, manifested upon the saints of God. Trust in the Lord, that He will number you in the age to come among those saints whom you saw and with whom you conversed. Go now on your way, and may the peace of God be with you."

Having said this, the Angel flew up to heaven.

I (Paphnutius recounts) was filled with such great fear and yet joy at the Angel's words that I could not stand on my feet and fell to the ground, unconscious. The holy servants of God raised me up and consoled me; then, offering me vegetables, they ate with me and gave thanks to God.

Finally, having greeted the saints, I set out on my journey. Those venerable youths gave me vegetables for the journey and escorted me five milliariae away. I earnestly asked them to tell me their names. They replied: the first was called John, the second Andrew, the third Heraklion, and the fourth Theophilus; and they commanded me to tell the brethren their names so that they might remember them. I asked them to remember me in their prayers. Then, having once again exchanged a mutual kiss in the Lord, we parted ways. They returned to their place, but I went in the direction of Egypt.

As I set out for the desert, I was sad, but at the same time joyful; I was grieved because I had been deprived of the sight and sweet conversation of such great saints of God, of whom the whole world would not have been worthy; but I rejoiced that I had been granted their blessing and the contemplation of an Angel, as well as communion from the hands of Angels.

I walked for three days; then I came to a hermitage and met two brothers there, living as hermits. I stayed with them for ten days and told them all I had seen and heard in the desert. They listened to me with great tenderness and joy; then they said: "Truly, Father Paphnutius, you have been granted great mercy from God, for you have seen such great servants of God."

Those two brothers led a very virtuous life and loved God with all their hearts; they wrote down all they heard from my lips. Having greeted them, I returned to my monastery. They sent a record of my story to all the holy fathers and brothers living in the skete. All, reading and listening, received great spiritual benefit and glorified God, who shows His great mercies on His servants. Then they placed a record of what I said in church, so that all who wished could read it, for it was very edifying and taught divine contemplation. I, the lesser servant Paphnutius, having been deemed worthy of such grace from God (of which I am by no means worthy), proclaim to all, both orally and in writing, what I was commanded to proclaim, for the glory of God, for the memory of God's saints, and for the benefit of those who seek the salvation of their souls. May the grace and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all, through the prayers of our holy and venerable fathers who pleased Him, now and forever and ever. Amen.

Kontakion, Tone 3:

Illumined by the radiance of the Holy Spirit, you, O God-wise one, abandoned the banal life and reached the desert, O venerable father, bringing joy to God, the Creator of all. For this reason, Christ glorifies you, O blessed one, the great Giver of Gifts.

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Notes

[3857] "It is not known with certainty," notes St. Demetrius of Rostov, "which particular Saint Paphnutius found Saint Onuphrius in the desert, for in the Church Histories and the Patericons we encounter several saints named Paphnutius. Another was Paphnutius, bishop of the mountainous Thebaid, one of the Egyptian lands, who suffered during the time of the impious Roman Emperor Maximian (305-311), and had his right eye gouged out. Later, during the reign of the great Constantine (306-337), he was present at the First Ecumenical Council, convened in the city of Nicaea (in 325). When the Holy Fathers wanted to establish as a law that priests and deacons should not have wives, he stood in the midst of the council and loudly declared: "Do not impose a heavy burden and yoke on the servants of the Church." And this Paphnutius zealously opposed all the holy fathers in this matter, although he himself was a virgin from his mother's womb. No one could say anything against him, so the matter was left to the discretion of each individual; therefore, the presbyters and deacons of the Eastern Church continue to accept this blessed matrimony to this day. This is recounted by the Greek historians: Socrates (Book 1, Chapter 8), Sozomen (Book 1, Chapter 22), and Nicephorus (Book 8, Chapter 19). The memory of this Paphnutius in the Roman Menologion is set for the 11th day of September; in the Russian Menologion, as well as in the Prologues, he is nowhere mentioned. Another was Paphnutius the Martyr, who also struggled in the Egyptian deserts and suffered during the reign of Diocletian (284–305), being crucified on a date palm. His story is found in the Prologue on September 25 from Alexandria, an Egyptian city, the father of Saint Euphrosyne , whose memory is celebrated on September 25. Another was Paphnutius, also an Egyptian, who converted Thais, the harlot, to repentance , whose memory is celebrated on October 8. Another was Paphnutius, a disciple of Saint Macarius of Alexandria , who recounts how a hyena brought its blind puppy to Saint Macarius for healing. Another was Paphnutius, nicknamed Mullet, mentioned in the book of Rufinus (a historian of the fourth century) "Prophecies of the Fathers," and in the book of Palladius "Lavsaic" (chapter 91), who walked for eighty years in the same clothes. In the Prologues there are also words about several other Paphnutiis; thus, on the 25th of November,

there is a word about the monk Paphnutius, how he saved a robber by drinking a cup of wine; on the 9th of March, there is a word about the monk Paphnutius, who prayed to God to tell him to whom he was like; and he received the information that he was like the elder of the village; about this same Paphnutius, on the 27th of the same month, there is a word that he was like a piper. Concerning the Paphnutius who found the Venerable Onuphrius, we have no news.

[3858] Egypt was the usual home of many ascetics. Monastic communities were located in both Lower and Middle Egypt. The Nitrian Desert, located in Lower Egypt and lying inland beyond the Nile River, was particularly renowned. The inner, or skete, desert lay several days' journey beyond the desert of the cenobitic monasteries. It was a wild, sandy desert, with only occasional springs of water; there was no beaten path—the path was guided by the course of the stars.

[3859] His memory is on the same day.

[3860] Cenobia (from the Greek - common and - life) are called communal monasteries, in which the brethren are supported at the expense of the monastery and in return offer their labor for the common benefit of the monastery.

[3861] Or Erati.

[3862] A milliarium is a Roman mile, or more accurately, a Roman milestone, because at the end of each milestone stood a stone pillar as a marker. A milliarium was equal to 8 stadia (a stadium is 88 fathoms), which is approximately 1.12 *of our versts. Milestones were scattered throughout Italy; they were usually inscribed with the name of the builder or the emperor during whose reign they were erected. The first milestone, from which all others originated and where all roads converged, was located in Rome, near the Temple of Saturn. Remains of this stone were found during excavations in Rome.*

[3863] The death of St. Onuphrius occurred in the 4th century.

[3864] It's worth noting that Egypt, especially in areas near the Nile River, was quite rich in flora. Date palms, acacias, mulberry trees, cotton, sugarcane, indigo, and other plants grew there in abundance.

[3865] The city of Oxyrhynchus was located in the Upper Thebaid. It was renowned for the piety of its inhabitants; according to the historian Rufinus (who lived in the fourth century), it housed up to ten thousand virgins and twenty thousand virgins within its boundaries. Today, it is the village of Benezech.